1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
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291 cotton material cut in European style; or instead of these has at least an extra round or two of his loin-cloth which he can throw loosely over his shoulder, or a small cotton sheet to answer the same purpose.

The women's loin-cloth is worn like that of their men, but in front is not knotted in such a way as to make a long flap necessary to cover the front of their thighs; it looks, therefore, like a short skirt from their waists to just above their knees. In the fields and jungles and in their own homes they still go with their breasts uncovered save for their masses of ornaments; but they have become somewhat self-conscious, owing to misguided officials suggesting that it was improper for them to appear like this before their Chief or at high officials' camps; and they frequently, when going to a bazaar or festival, or to dance at a wedding or camp, start off with their breasts loosely covered with a cotton sheet or one or two folds of their loin-cloth wrapped loosely from one hip over the opposite shoulder, their beads and finery resting on top of this cloth. Generally, however, the cloth is too small or too loosely thrown over the body really to conceal the breasts. They have this favourite riddle :— [538]

'Bara palle lote haven honda podo',

meaning, 'What is the pair of bullocks that cannot be confined within the byre of the twelve parts of the body?' to which the answer is '*Dudo*', or 'Woman's breasts'. They explained this as referring to the refusal of the breasts to be concealed by any wrap. Moreover, as soon as women warm to the dance they rapidly divest themselves of the unwonted wrap.

Most men now wear a *pagri* or turban, tied in the usual fashion of the Hindu population of the adjacent Chhattisgarh districts, and far more ample than the rag worn by the Hill Marias. They do not adorn it with feathers; nor do they wear bead chains or fillets on their heads like the Hill Marias. They use far fewer 301 ornaments; they do not wear the brass wire *mappuradang* rings in 304 the helix of the ear, but sometimes a single small ring like the tasselled ring of the Hill Marias, but worn in a hole in the cartilage near the darwinian tubercle, from which a small gilt chain depends. In the lobe a small ear plug of gold or gilded brass, often with a little red or green stone or glass set in it, may anchor two or three gilt chains fastened at the top to a similar plug vertically above it in the helix. Most men content themselves with one or two small 301 bead necklaces (*mungya*) round their necks, the beads being all of one shape, scarlet or royal blue tubular glass, or pale green humming-top-shaped, both kinds considerably larger than the Hill Marias'

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over her from the roof, and she has to catch some and drink it. In some villages, again, if a man marries a widow or another man's wife, the woman must stand below the eaves with a *bassia latifolia* leaf on her head. The Waddai pours water and rice-beer from the roof, all over her, and after this she can enter her new home. When Oyami Anda of Bara Harmamunda married a giri for whom a Lamana'i youth had already been engaged, he had to stand with his rival's brother under the eaves of his house for a ceremony 'to make them forget enmity'. Anda's right hand was placed below the other's right hand, both having the palms upward. In front of them the Waddai made a heap of rice and set an arrow upright in it. He climbed on the roof and poured water over the hands of the two men who allowed it to flow down the arrow and over the rice. Afterwards Anda gave a pig and two fowls to the dispossessed Lamana'i as an offering to the latter's *hanal*. Had this ceremony not been performed, Anda—so he believed—would have suffered from a watery swelling of the body. 823

Page 262. Marias of both kinds are exceptionally virtuous in their sexual lives. Venereal disease is almost unknown, except in the vicinity of the few schools. Several old men have assured me—and I believe them—that since marriage they had had no other woman than their own wives. Love-charms and erotic stimulants are not much in demand and are not approved. At Molasnar there was a Naiko who was said to be making some sort of living by selling love-potions to the Marias; he used to administer them in liquor or tobacco and once a woman took one of them she would follow her lover everywhere 'like a pet dog'. But a Maria said, 'If I bring a girl in this way, my store of rice will grow less for such a union is not a yoking of the house of Mahapurub, and the girl will probably leave me after a time.' Vetti Muda of Dhurli described how when he was a young man (he must have been born about 1870), he used to take a regular diet of monkey's flesh. 'As a result I became very strong and active and could hop from tree to tree like a monkey. Once when I was going through the forest a monkey slipped from the overhanging branch of an ebony tree and was killed by the fall. I cut off its organ and roasted and ate it, with the result that I became so potent that I needed four wives at once.' But it is characteristic of the Maria—as against, for example, the ordinary Gond, Pardhan or Baiga—that he should have used the word 'wives'. 832

Page 269, *line* 27. Grigson has recorded 2 Hill Maria folk-tales. In my *Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal* I give 5 Bison-horn Maria, 37 Muria and 13 Kuruk stories, some of which are probably known also to the Hill Marias, for they were recorded in villages 538

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538 not far distant from the Abujhmar. The Kuruk stories are almost certainly current also among the Bison-horn Maria. Two of the five specifically Bison-horn Maria tales, like one of the two Maria tales, are about monkeys. The first describes a helpful monkey which is treated with great ingratitude by human beings; in the second—as in Grigson's tale—a monkey marries a human girl and does not make a very great success of the union. In neither case, however, is there any reference to the dispareunia which the Baigas delight to emphasize in stories of the 'Beast Marriage' type. Two of the other tales, 'The Magic Eyes' and 'The Loving Ghost' are exceptionally charming and, while full of conventional folk-lore clichés, strike a note of some originality. In my *Myths of Middle India*, I give Bison-horn Maria legends of the creation of the world, the making of the sun and moon, the origin of fire and several stories of the Vagina Dentata cycle.

178 *Page* 280, *line* 34. In the country round Gidam and Barsur, many clans that follow the megalithic tradition elsewhere have abandoned the practice of erecting menhirs, though the Barse, Kalmu and Kunjami clans continue it and erected twenty-six menhirs within the limits of the Gidam Revenue Circle in the years 1938-42. In the Jagdalpur tahsil, though the custom is less well maintained here than elsewhere, the Poyami, Vetti, Bekor, Kuharami, Marvi Padami and Muchaki at least continue to erect *urashal* stones. Near Jagdalpur, however, and in the neighbourhood of Paknar, there has been some falling off of the practice.

Whatever may be the reason for the abandonment of megalithic customs—and I am rather sceptical about the influence of the Hindu taboo on beef-eating—certain clans have been affected by the warnings of their priests. In Vagriguda, for example, a village in the heart of an area where these customs flourish undisturbed, no menhirs are erected now because once when the village was overwhelmed by an epidemic, the Siraha declared that it was because the Village Mother was annoyed at the practice. The [187] Telami clan have abandoned the practice in the Dhurli area because once when they were quarrying a stone to serve as a menhir, a snake wriggled out of the crack, and this was taken as a sign of the divine displeasure. I believe that many culture changes in India are not due to the spread of civilization but are caused by incidents like these.

000 *Page* 281, *line* 24. The upper stone is called *danya-kal* and its supports *odiyal*. In the Kutru zamindari, the Akri clan calls the upper stone *gariyakal*. The Chudala Marvi clan erects both *urashal* and *danyakal* stones throughout the Konta tahsil and in such villages as Gogonda, Mankapal and Koya Vekur. So do the

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THE MURIA'S LIVELIHOOD

XII. The Sago-Palm

273 137 Another very popular drink is the juice of the sago-palm, and since the Muria have developed many legends round it I will give the subject a section of its own.[1]

The sago-palm (*Caryota urens*, Linn.), which is known as *gorga marra* in Gondi and as *salpi rukh* in Halbi, is widely distributed over the greater part of the State. It is an erect monoecious tree, with axillary spadices, which sometimes grows to the height of sixty or eighty feet. Its long bipinnate leaves with their fish-tail ends are sometimes twenty feet long. The aboriginals, whether Hill Maria, Bison-horn Maria or Muria,[2] regard the trees primarily as a source of liquor, though they use the inner tissues of the stem and the wood for other purposes. The popularity of the tree is shown in the riddle, [524 'Above sits the parrot, below is the thrashing-floor', suggesting that under the beautiful sago-palm a great crowd of people gather, and in such songs as '*Waliya wāto gorga ale mīmāle*—O uncle, the sago-palms are everywhere you go'. Unlike mahua spirit, however, salphi juice is not usually used in worship or on other ceremonial occasions.[3] It is rather a drink for one's private and friendly hours, though it may often supplement a failing supply of mahua at a marriage or funeral.

824 As always, legends and stories gather about anything that is intimately connected with the life of the people. There are several different accounts ●538 of the origin of the sago-palm, but all agree in connecting it with youth and gaiety. It came into being when maidens danced together or when boys pursued their loves. In the north of the State the most common legend traces its origin to an expedition of boys and girls from the house of Bhagavan, which came down to earth to dance and bathe.[4] One such party came to Chikhli village on the northernmost plateau of the State and after bathing, the girls left behind the cowrie ornaments of their hair. These ornaments are very popular among the motiari; sometimes a mass of cowries covers the whole of the back of their heads. When the girls found they had lost their ornaments they were angry and cursed the cowries saying, 'Now turn into sago-palms and we will always live with you and will never lose you again.' For this reason it is said that the cowrie is the tuft of feathers that fell from Lingo's turban. Yet again it is said that the tree was a feather stuck in the hair of a motiari which fell off as she was going to Penjori village to dance the Diwali dances, and turned into a tree when she got angry with it. But everywhere it is agreed that the tree springs up in all those places where the girls either from the house of Bhagavan or from some earthly ghotul used to go to dance. In the forests above the Raughat and all along the northern plateau there are a great many of these trees and these were the very parts where the girls went for their dancing in the dawn of the world.

There are, however, some other versions of the origin of the palm. In Mule village the Muria say that when the seven salphi maidens (Gorga Kanyang) were born they only had one placenta between them. This was cut off and

[1] For a fuller account see my article 'The Sago-Palm in Bastar State', *JRAS. Bom.*, Vol. XVIII (N.S. 1942), pp. 69–78.

[2] Grigson is not quite correct in saying that Hill and Bison-horn Maria 'almost alone in Bastar use salphi liquor'.—Grigson, op. cit., p. 224. The Muria of the north are among the most enthusiastic drinkers of salphi juice in the whole State.

[3] According to Thurston, the fermented juice is used ceremonially at marriages and festivals by the Poroja and Savara.—Thurston, op. cit., Vol. VI, pp. 216, 322.

[4] The seven heavenly damsels who came down to dance and bathe on earth is a common motif in Indian folk-tales. See Thurston, op. cit., Vol. VII, p. 100.

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

buried by their mother. Almost immediately the seven sisters ran away, and when the mother could not find them, she went to the place where the placenta was buried and let the milk from her breasts fall upon it. As the days went by there gradually grew up from the placenta a tree which was full of milk. This was the sago-palm that was born from milk and always gives milk. There is a riddle—'Milk comes from the horns of the buffalo'.

Another story comes from Pharasgaon. Long ago there were eleven brothers and one day as they went hunting in the jungle they grew very thirsty. They came to a group of palm trees and rested in their shade. The youngest brother looked up at the tree and said, 'This is a very fine tree. Surely there is water hidden in its branches! I can see a pot tied there. Who can climb up and get it?' Each of the brothers tried to climb the tree and failed, for when they were nearly at the top they saw that the pot was full of blood. But the youngest boy made a rope of siari fibre and climbed up and when he looked in the pot the juice appeared to him as milk. He brought it down and they all drank of it. The ten elder brothers fell senseless but the youngest boy was intoxicated with pleasure. But he grew afraid thinking that his brothers would die. Then his god said to him, 'Offer a pig to the Gorga Kanyang and they will recover'. He sacrificed a pig and his brothers sat up again.

This is the origin of the sacrifices that are made to the tree before it is tapped. It is believed that if no offerings are made the juice turns into blood and makes the people ill. If offerings are withheld for a long time, the tree dries up.

In the Chota Dongar area, the Hill Maria of the Abujhmar and the Muria of their immediate neighbourhood trace the palm to Tallur Muttai or Mother Earth herself. At the beginning of the world, Tallur Muttai came with Kadrengal (whom some call her brother and some her husband) to the forest of Bastar. Kadrengal was innocent of sexual desire, and so Tallur Muttai created sago-palms with the hope that their juice would excite him. When Kadrengal first went to tap the trees, he tied a thread from the cut peduncle down to a hole which he dug below, but the wind blew it to and fro and the juice was scattered. Then Tallur Muttai taught him how to tie a gourd to catch the juice and place a leaf to guide it safely. Kadrengal drank a great quantity; desire came to him; and he went to Tallur Muttai.

But the Hill Maria of Jharagaon and Nalnar say that the palms originated when the seven Kanyang, daughters of Bhagavan, came down to Singardip (the world) to bathe. They combed their hair, and wherever their hairs fell the trees sprang up. They give the names of three of the Maidens of the sago-palm—Fuse Kanyang, Ganganangi Kanyang and Kondakalbuli Kanyang.

The palms are carefully guarded. Sometimes a large bamboo mat is tied round the trunk; sometimes bundles of thorns are placed to deter the thief. The owners sometimes live in little leaf-huts built below the trees in order to guard them. The tree is climbed by a long bamboo pole which hooks on to a branch at the summit. The side-shoots of the pole are not removed and these serve as the steps of the ladder. When not in use it is removed and kept in a house or in some hiding-place in the jungle. Sometimes a large loop is made at the end of the ladder and it fixes on to a bamboo hook which is tied to the tree.

This is the method of extracting the juice. The ends of the flowering spadices are cut and hollow bamboos, gourds or earthen pots are fixed where they can catch the flow of sap. Bamboos or gourds are simply tied to the tree, but a pot may be fixed in position with a couple of poles below it tied round the trunk and fixed together supported by a string tied to a bough above. The pot is placed inside a basket and its mouth tied to the spadix, to the end

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When you saw me and knew that your heart was not captured, why did you ruin me? What am I to do now? Tell me. Where am I to go?'

Inside the ghotul sexual anaesthesia is known, but it is uncommon and is regarded as a sort of deviation. I have met a few Muria who have never been to the ghotul or who have never shared its sexual activities. Dhansingh Pandu of Palki is a man of some forty years and still unmarried. He has never been to a ghotul. His father used to say to him, 'These boys talk in front of their sisters as if they were their lovers. You don't know what gods there are in the ghotul; many gods live there; you might unwittingly offend one of them and be destroyed. No one knows what people may have in their hearts when all sleep together.' But it was not only his father's exaggerated fears of the supernatural that stopped Dhansingh from attending the ghotul; he himself had no desire to go. But now he regrets it. 'I am a very lonely man', he told me. 'I might now be happily married. But at that time I was very poor and I had no passion.' The real reason for his abstinence seems to have been a dread that he would be forced into sexual intercourse for which he had neither power nor inclination.

Another Muria who has never been a chelik is Hagru of Masora. In his youth he lived in the Hindu potters' quarter of Kondagaon town where there was, of course, no ghotul. 'I used to feel very lonely when I heard how happy the other boys were, but what could I do?'

Early marriage sometimes brings ghotul life to a premature close. In Malakot, I found the people arranging their children's marriages as early as possible 'to prevent copulation in the ghotul'. Old Sukali of Masora was married so young that 'she never even learnt to sing a Relo'. But child-marriage is not common and young married girls are generally allowed to attend the ghotul till puberty or until they are sent to live with their husbands.

Although the Muria insist on abstinence from sexual congress before the ceremonial hunts and require their priests to remain celibate on various occasions, the rule does not seem to be due to any special regard for celibacy as such or belief in its power; it is rather connected with the dread of the menstruous woman. On the eve of a festival all the males of a village must sleep in the ghotul—which for that night is cleared of motiari—to ensure that none of their wives or other relatives will infect them with the defilement of a catamenial period that might begin during the night. So too the very strict rules governing a young Gaita's relations with women in the Chota Dongar Pargana appear to be based mainly on a desire to isolate him from the dreaded menstrual contact.

Celibacy is not admired, and it is dangerous to be unmarried, for a man or woman who dies in this condition lives for ever restless and frustrated, and a nuisance to the friends he has left behind on earth. It should be noted that it is marriage and not sexual experience that is important. The Hindu sadhu is rarely respected, though he may be feared for his supposed supernatural powers. The state of *sannyās* is everywhere associated in the aboriginals' mind with idleness and beggary rather than with chastity. In Alor the chelik spoke very scornfully of celibacy: 'It is a way of life for loafers.' And of boys and girls who stand aside from the main life of the ghotul, they say 'they will get children directly they begin'. 'There may be one in a thousand girls who tries to keep her water, but she will get a child in her *haldi-dhoti*', while her clothes are still stained with the marriage turmeric. It is dangerous to store up power, for when it is released it may prove too potent.

In order to enforce this attitude, the chelik tell a number of stories illustrating the danger of breaking the ghotul traditions. One such tale, from

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THE MURIA'S ATTITUDE TO SEX

X883 589 ●538 Atargaon, is about the seven motiari who knew nothing about sex. One day they went to gather leaves with their grandmother. The old lady climbed a tree and the girls looked up and saw her vagina. When she told them what it was for, they were so frightened that they left the ghotul and went to live far away in the jungle. Whenever they saw a man they beat him and drove him away. The story proceeds through various adventures to the inevitable conclusion. Each of the girls is seduced by a sadhu and becomes pregnant.

X883 539 Another story, given me by Sonu, a Muria of Jamkot, is of interest as emphasizing the ghotul doctrine of equality, that everyone in the ghotul fellowship must be loved and happy: if not, disaster may befall.

There were seven score chelik and seven score motiari. All slept together in the ghotul. One of them was the son of a grazier of goats, and none of the girls would sleep with him. When he came to the ghotul, they would abuse him. 'Get out, you grazier's son, you block of wood.' The boy's name was Lakari; that was why they called him a block of wood. But Lakari was a clever boy and he made a love-charm.

One day the boys and girls decided to go to Kodawata to earn their living. When he heard of this, Lakari decided to have all the girls for himself. He put the boys to sleep by his charms. When the girls were ready for their journey, he went ahead beating his drum. They thought that all the boys had started and set out after them.

Now Lakari was very poor; his bed was the earth, his blanket was the air, his pillow was his own elbow. He was so poor that no girl would let him sleep with her. He went along with an axe over his shoulder, his *dâol* drum slung from his arm and a drumstick in one hand. He led the girls away into the jungle, on and on for a whole month. When he beat the drum they ran after him, but he always kept at a distance so that they wouldn't know who it was.

The jungle stretched for twelve *kos* on every side, there was not even the name of a village. The jungle was called Madhuban, the sweet forest; the trees were so tall that it seemed the moon had stuck to them. When Lakari had led the girls into the very heart of this jungle, he took off his clothes and sat shivering with cold. When the girls saw that the chelik were not there and it was only Lakari who had brought them all that way, they were angry and disappointed.

On a hill-top between two rivers Lakari built a ghotul for himself. On the far side of the river he made another house for the girls. They refused to visit him or even look at him, they were so angry. By the time the rains began they found they had eaten all their provisions for the year. Lakari himself had nothing; he lived on honey.

Now at last one of the girls came to him and said, 'How are we to live here without a village or bazaar? Even you can give us nothing to eat'. Lakari replied, 'I will see to everything; come with me to the bazaar and we will get what we want'. The girls went fishing in the river, and this girl brought fish in a basket and he himself took honey and they went together to the bazaar at Ladri. They sold their things and bought what they wanted. On the way back, Lakari went as slowly as he could so that they would have to spend the night in the jungle and the girl would have to sleep with him. When darkness fell he made her a bed in the sand of a river; there was one bed for him and one for her with a fire between. He had brought food and ornaments to please her.

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if they catch them relieving themselves. There is nothing very subtle or witty in any of this. In fact, since there are so few taboos on sex in the ghotul it is rather difficult to be funny about it.

It is worth noting that even the gods are not above a bit of horse-play. In Adnar I watched the young deity Chelik Sai, who was after all a chelik and conveniently represented by a long erect pole, amusing himself with a group of motiari. In the hands of his medium he pranced about, poking himself at the girls, chasing them about, pretending to catch them and ride upon them. Another medium carrying an iron chain amused everybody by his absurd gestures; he would dance round and round a line of girls, bend down and peer up into their faces in the most ridiculous manner. In Metawand, one of the horses of the gods was chased about the field, and roars of laughter greeted the divine sport.

A common type of funny story finds its humour in an absurd and indecorous situation. In Metawand I was told the tale of the woman who is going along the road in the rains. Some of the mud gets into her vagina and when she stops at a stream to wash it, a crab catches hold of her clitoris. She calls a man to help, but hard as he pulls at the crab he cannot make it let go. At last he tries to bite it off, but it gets hold of his nose with its spare claw, and there they all are—on a public highway, the respectable Muria with his nose stuck in the vagina of an unknown woman. After a while along comes a Lohar and gets the crab out with his tongs, but only on condition that the woman will give him 'tobacco' whenever he wants it. Some days later he comes to her house to claim his reward. She is busy cooking and asks him to lie down on a cot until she is ready. He lies on his face, but he is so excited that his erect penis goes through the strings of the cot and protrudes below. A cat thinking it a bit of meat, catches it. The situation is now reversed. The woman comes out and refuses to release the Lohar unless he declares her quit of her debt to him.

Another tale, from Aturgaon, which is known in Bengal and to the Uraon, but is given an entirely fresh and vivid turn by the Muria, again gets its effect from the sticking together, in public and deplorable juxtaposition, of incongruous things: a man and woman cannot get apart, a midwife finds her hands stuck to her head and nothing on below, a magician discovers a bullock's horns sticking to his bottom. Personally I think this tale is really funny, even in its bare and literal form.

There was a Muria Raja with one son. In his village was a barber who also had an only son. The two boys were always playing together, they would never do their work. The Raja used to tell his son to go and plough in the fields, but he always refused. At last the Raja got very angry and turned him out. The boy put on his ornaments and took a bag of money, mounted his horse and rode away. As he went he met the barber's son and told him that he was going to his future father-in-law's house. The barber's son said he would go with him.

Presently, the Raja's son said he wanted to relieve himself. There were no leafy trees at hand so the barber's son said, 'You had better take off your clothes and ornaments and go to the jungle in your loin cloth'. While the Raja's son was away, the barber's son put on his clothes and ornaments and rode off on the horse.

When the boy returned and found his things gone, he wept so loudly that Bara Deo heard his crying and came to him in the shape of an old

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IV. FOLK-TALES

883 538 Folk-tales and legends are told in the ghotul if there is a boy there who knows any. There does not seem to be a formal 'right' of possession over a particular story, but in practice certain stories are connected with special people. One boy knows a story which was taught him by an elder boy on leaving the ghotul or by his father, and this boy is always called on to recite it.

883 538 533 No one is likely to forget the experience of listening to one of these stories, which are often in a sort of rhythmic prose and chanted to a recognizable tune. The most remarkable that I have heard was a long and rambling Ghotul Pata chanted by Dasru of the Markabera ghotul. Dasru sat in the middle of the room, a little group of boys near him, the other chelik and motiari reclining near. He sat very upright and sang with great animation, gesticulating with his hands and the boys near him joined in a chorus and beat the ground with little sticks.

I heard another beautifully sung story in the Masora ghotul. This was the tale of the Ogre and the Little Girl; the boy who 'owned' it was a very small boy, the Anter. He and a friend sang in a curious shrill falsetto and the whole ghotul joined in the chorus:

Rai sarso sarso phul nunike nāngar gurdum—gurdum gurdum gurdum.
Rākas bukas barma bhat des nuni kuchi kewar—gurdum gurdum gurdum.

The story was chanted in a kind of rhythm, while the beat of the chorus was irresistible, the boys booming grandly on the *gurdum*.

Sometimes the narrative of the tale is in 'prose' and is recited in the ordinary speaking voice, and the dialogue is sung, occasionally in rhymed couplets. The boys and girls sit round listening with great attention, and nod their heads saying '*Hingo*, Yes', at the right moments.

883 538 Most of these stories have been published separately for it would have taken too much space to include them here.[1] I am, however, giving two narrative poems which throw some light on conditions of life in the ghotul. The first is the Ghotul Pata mentioned above, which illustrates the custom of a ceremonial beat for fish before a festival, the appointment of the Gaita's children as ghotul leaders, and the relations of brother and sister in the dormitory.

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Ghotul Pata of Markabera

The Gaita of the village gathered them all together saying,
'Look brothers, the month of Magh has come again,
And we must decide about the Mango Festival'.
Everyone came and eagerly decided,
For already other villages had kept the Festival.
'Certainly, we also will keep the Festival, but what curry shall we eat?'
'Haven't we many chelik and motiari in our ghotul?
Send the chelik and motiari to catch fish for the Festival.'
So said the leaders, and the chelik and motiari prepared to go.
When they were ready the chelik and motiari went to catch fish.

[1] See my *Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal* (Bombay, 1944), which includes many Muria stories; some appear to be original, others turn on such universal motifs as those of the Quest, Grateful Animals, Brother-Sister Incest, the Hero on Pilgrimage.